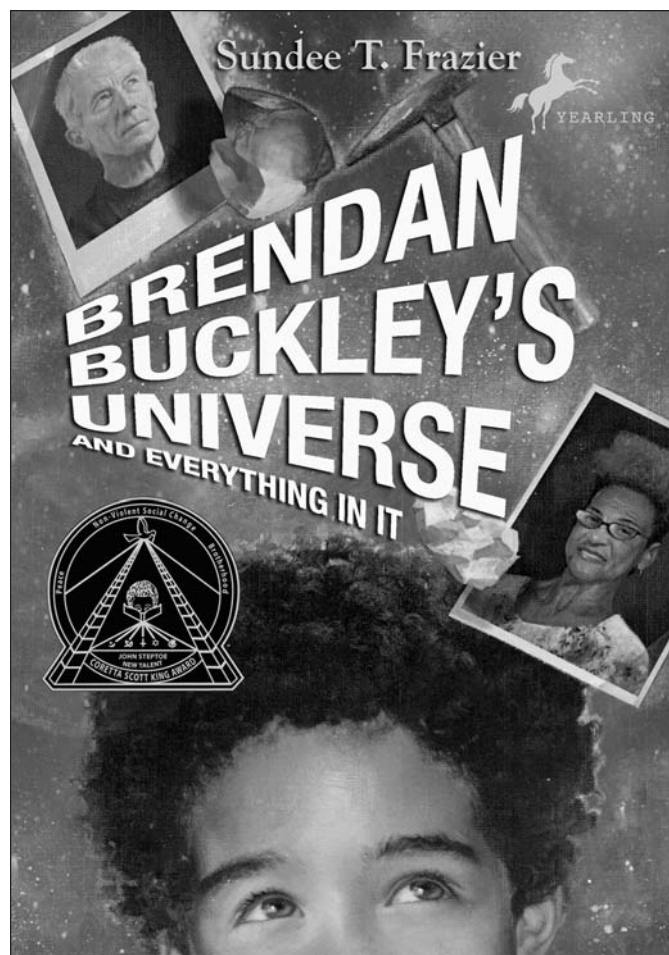


BOOKNOTES

educators guide



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THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Family/Biracial Family
Intergenerational Relationships
Honesty & Truth • Secrets
Forgiveness • Prejudice & Bigotry

GRADES 4-7

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ten-year-old Brendan Buckley has the mind of a scientist, but during one summer vacation he uncovers a dark family secret, and learns that science cannot explain or solve matters of the heart.

Brendan Buckley, a biracial ten-year-old, is a budding scientist and a Tae Kwon Do blue belt. He keeps a confidential notebook for his top-secret scientific discoveries, but so far the notebook contains more questions than answers. On a trip to the mall with Gladys, his recently widowed paternal grandmother, Brendan stumbles upon an exhibit of rocks and minerals sponsored by the Puyallup Rock Club. He is immediately interested, but Gladys recognizes the man behind the exhibit and briskly snatches Brendan away. He has questions, but Gladys gives no answers. This fuels Brendan's curiosity, and he sets out on a secret mission that leads him to Ed DeBose, the white grandpa he has never met. Brendan calls upon his scientific problem-solving ability to find out the reason behind his grandpa's absence, and why his mother refuses to see or talk to him. What Brendan discovers is the toughest truth of all—science cannot explain matters of the heart.

AWARDS

A Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe
Award for New Talent

An NCSS-CBC Notable Children's Trade
Books in the Field of Social Studies

A Children's Book Committee at Bank
Street College Best Children's Book of
the Year with Outstanding Merit

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Invite a counselor or social worker to speak to the class about the “tough” issues that racially mixed families encounter in our society. Then have students make a list of five solutions to the problem of racial and cultural prejudices. Ask students to share their list in class.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

FAMILY/BIRACIAL FAMILY

Ask students to discuss Brendan’s relationship with his parents. How does Brendan describe each person’s role in his family? Brendan is an only child. Discuss how Brendan’s life might be different if he had a sibling. How is Khalfani a “surrogate” brother? Engage the class in a conversation about how Mrs. Buckley’s wounded relationship with her father shapes the way she deals with Brendan. Which family member has the most to gain from Brendan’s discovery?

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Ask students to describe Brendan’s relationship with Grandpa Clem. How does Brendan deal with Grandpa Clem’s death? Discuss how missing Grandpa Clem makes Brendan question the absence of his other grandpa. Brendan sets out on a journey to find Grandpa DeBose. Discuss how his grandpa reacts to him when they come face to face. What does Brendan want from his grandpa? How does their relationship grow as the novel progresses? Debate whether Brendan can expect the same type of relationship with Grandpa DeBose that he had with Grandpa Clem.

HONESTY & TRUTH

Brendan says, “Truth is what scientists are always searching for.” (p. 12) What is the truth that Brendan is searching for? Discuss why it took so long for his parents to be honest with him about the absence of Grandpa DeBose. What Brendan likes most about Gladys is that she always tells the truth. Discuss Gladys’s reaction when she and Brendan see Ed DeBose at the mall. How does her reaction lead Brendan toward his search for truth? Discuss how Brendan’s problem-solving ability helps him untangle the truth? Explain Brendan’s ethical dilemma when he earns the purple belt in Tae Kwon Do. How does this achievement make him rethink the importance of the truth?

SECRETS

Engage the class in a discussion about the relationship between having secrets and being truthful. Ask them to define the term *dark secret*. How is Ed DeBose a dark secret in the Buckley family? Why does Brendan keep his search for his grandpa a secret from his parents? Every scientist needs a sidekick, or an assistant. How does Khalfani fulfill this role in Brendan’s “top secret” journey? At what point is Brendan’s secret revealed? Explain his mother’s confession, “Maybe keeping you from my father was my way to get back at him.” (p. 179)

FORGIVENESS

Brendan takes a message from a fortune cookie that reads, “The one who forgives ends the argument.” (p. 113) Why does Brendan’s mother feel that her father should be the one to fix their relationship? Explain the symbolism of the agate that Ed gives to Brendan. Why does Ed give Brendan the “Welcome Baby Boy” card? How do Ed’s gifts make Brendan understand that he should heed the advice of the fortune cookie and forgive his grandpa?

PREJUDICE & BIGOTRY

Grandpa Clem once told Brendan that “God made people different colors to test us—and we’d been failing ever since.” (p. 42) What is the test? Describe society’s failure. Discuss how Brendan is the target of such a test. Discuss how prejudices are developed. Brendan overhears a little girl say that his family “doesn’t match.” (p. 36) How might the child’s mother explain Brendan’s racially mixed family without prejudice? Brendan learned from Grandpa Clem that looking into a person’s eyes reveals the soul of the person. What does Brendan learn about the soul of Ed DeBose? What might Ed DeBose’s eyes reveal at the end of the novel?

CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

LANGUAGE ARTS

Grandpa DeBose gives Brendan a “Welcome Baby Boy” card that his grandmother had intended to send when Brendan was born. Write a poem titled “Welcome Baby Boy” that Ed DeBose might write for Brendan that symbolizes forgiveness and an open heart.

The five tenets of Tae Kwon Do are courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit. Ask students to write a personal essay that Brendan might write that reveals how these tenets have shaped his character. Which tenet might Brendan say is his weakest? Which is his strongest?

SCIENCE

Brendan is a science enthusiast, but he doesn’t discover geology until he meets Ed DeBose. Ask students to use books in the library or internet resources such as library.thinkquest.org/J002289/fact.html to find fascinating facts about rocks and minerals. Divide the class into small groups and instruct them to develop questions and answers for a *Jeopardy* game focused on geology. After each group shares their questions, ask the class to place the questions into appropriate categories.

SCIENCE & LANGUAGE ARTS

Refer students to page 74 of the novel and ask them to reread the passage where Brendan says that slate reminds him Grandpa Clem. Have students identify a rock or mineral from their research that might best describe each of the principal characters in the novel. Ask them to write character sketches, taking language from the properties and characteristics of the rocks they have chosen.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Display a map of the United States and ask students to divide the country into four sections. Ask each student to select one section of the country and find out the rocks and minerals found in that area. Instruct students to plan a geological trip for Brendan and his grandpa. Have them make a travel brochure that includes a day-by-day itinerary with specific emphasis on geological digs and the rocks and minerals they can expect to find.

ART

Have students read about National Grandparents Day on the following Web site: www.grandparents-day.com. Then have them make a Grandparents Day card that Brendan might give to Grandpa Ed.

CAREERS

Brendan has a scientific mind, and has recently developed an interest in geology. Ask students to research the many different career paths for geologists. One excellent internet resource is geology.com/jobs.htm. Suggest that they search for colleges and universities in their state that offer majors in geology.

VOCABULARY | USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context of the story.

Such words may include:

p. 7 *humerus*
p. 15 *refraction*

p. 25 *catapult*
p. 27 *trajectory*

p. 59 *hypothesis*
p. 82 *prospector*

p. 91 *expedition*
p. 125 *Pangaea*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sundee T. Frazier, like Brendan Buckley, is proud to come from both black and white people. She is the author of *Check All That Apply: Finding Wholeness as a Multiracial Person*, and she especially wants to see young people grow up feeling good about their heritage and identity. She earned an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College. Like Brendan, Sundee spent her childhood searching for rocks and minerals. She lives in Seattle.

For more information about the author, visit www.sundeefrazier.com.

POST-READING ACTIVITY



Yearling PB: 978-0-440-42164-1

Have students read *The Search for Belle Prater* by Ruth White. Ask them to think about how Woodrow's search for his mother is similar to Brendan's search for his grandpa. Then have them write 10 questions they would ask both main characters for an article called "Matters of the Heart." Instruct students to write an opening paragraph for the article.

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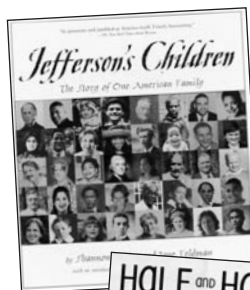


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